Abstract

The concept of group identity, and its implications for the self and relation to others are addressed by the social identity approach within psychology. I review this approach, comprising social identity theory, self-categorization theory, and the most important subsequent developments. Social identity theory not only addresses the bases for differentiation and discrimination between groups, but it also views social competition as a means for disadvantaged groups to challenge the status quo, helping to explain social change. Self-categorization theory develops the concept of group identity, clarifying the contrast with personal forms of identity, and extends the realm of application to address a range of classical phenomena within social psychology. These include issues clearly relating to the intergroup context (stereotyping, salience, collective behavior), as well as others where an intergroup dimension has not always been acknowledged (self, social influence, leadership, etc.). Some key extensions and developments of the social identity approach focus on contextual factors that can affect the salience and strategic expression of identity (the social identity model of deindividuation effects), how identity is transformed and radicalized through collective struggle (the elaborated social identity model), and the importance of emotions to group identity and group life (intergroup emotion theory). These extensions help to specify further the precise forms that group behavior may take and the processes responsible for this. The influence of the social identity approach not only within social psychology, but also beyond its borders, points both to the importance of group identity and to the heuristic and explanatory value of this theoretical tradition.

Introduction

In this chapter, I present an overview of the dominant approach to group identity within social psychology, the “social identity approach”—which includes social identity theory and its close
relative, self-categorization theory. Although other social sciences have addressed the concept of social or group identity, perhaps inevitably the psychological dimension of this concept is less well-developed in these other disciplines. And although there is a long history of research within social psychology on group processes, and indeed on intergroup relations, social identity theory was the first to theorize a distinct form of identity at the group level, and to accord ontological and explanatory significance to group identities.

The social identity approach has gained increasing and widespread influence outside the boundaries of social psychology, and indeed across disciplines. Social identity theory has proved particularly influential in areas of political science (Schildkraut, Chapter 36, this volume), organizational behavior (Haslam & Ellemers, Chapter 30, this volume), language and communication studies (Harwood & Giles, 2005), and related disciplines. For example, the concept of “organizational identity” central to industrial and organizational psychology, is imported directly from social identity theory, with the key article by Ashforth and Mael (1989) attracting over 1,500 citations to date (see also Haslam & Ellemers, Chapter 30, this volume). If anything, the concept of social identity derived from social identity theory has been even more influential beyond the disciplinary borders of social psychology than within. This focus on group identity from the perspective of the social identity approach therefore represents an important contribution to the understanding of group identity that transcends disciplinary boundaries. Moreover, although group identity was the first target of both social identity and self-categorization theory, self-categorization theory in particular is a general theory of identity, and consequently it has much to say about identity in its more personal and individual forms.

Social Identity Theory

Background

Social identity theory emerged in the mid-1970s from a concern that the prevailing individualistic approaches, characteristic of the dominant American mainstream social psychology of the day, were not equipped to explain some of the intergroup phenomena that were perhaps then more salient in Europe. This was particularly true for Henri Tajfel, a Polish Jew, who was studying in France at the outbreak of the Second World War, and who was destined to endure most of it as a prisoner of war. Clearly, Tajfel understood all too well the significance of group identity, not just as a source of meaning and value for one’s own group (often referred to in social psychology as the “in-group”), but also in terms of how it could be devalued and derogated by other groups (typically referred to as “out-groups”). He survived only by keeping his Jewish identity secret. This, along with the experience of resettling refugees in the aftermath of the war, profoundly colored his experience and his later work as a social psychologist.

It is perhaps a testament to the power of the prevailing individualism in social psychology at the time that Tajfel’s focus on group identity would emerge only many years later in the 1970s. However, Tajfel’s earlier work on social judgment and social perception can be seen as laying important groundwork for the emergence of the social identity approach. His research on categorization and the development of accentuation theory highlighted the cognitive consequences of (social) categorization processes, an important component in social identity theory and also later in self-categorization theory. He proposed that classifying physical stimuli (such as lines of different lengths) into categories could lead people to perceive between-category differences as larger (Tajfel & Wilkes, 1963) and within-category differences as smaller (see Eiser & Stroebe, 1972). Tajfel’s (1957) earlier work on perceptions of coin size demonstrated that a value dimension (in this case the monetary value associated with coins), when correlated with the dimension of actual size (such that larger coins are more valuable) could also accentuate the perceived size differences among different coins. This demonstration was consistent with the so-called “New Look” in psychology, in which values and motives were shown to influence
perception and cognition (Bruner, 1957a). In an influential article on the cognitive aspects of prejudice, Tajfel (1969) related such categorization effects to an understanding of some of the cognitive processes underlying prejudice. Ironically, this paper became very influential for a school of thought suggesting that cognitive processes were in some ways sufficient for our understanding of stereotyping and prejudice (Hamilton, 1981), a position from which Tajfel distanced himself (see, e.g., Tajfel, 1981).

Social Identity and Social Identification

Although processes of social categorization were an important component of understanding intergroup relations, taken on their own they were insufficient because they do not make clear the perceiver’s position in, and relation to, that social world. A process of social identification with the groups to which we belong is an important element that connects us to groups, and that tells us both who we are and who we are not. A social identity is thus the product of a process of social categorization and of identification with the groups we belong to, which we then characterize as part of ourselves. Tajfel defined social identity (or group identity), in both cognitive and evaluative terms, as that part of the self-concept corresponding to knowledge of the group membership together with the value and emotional significance of that membership (Tajfel, 1978a).

It might be useful to summarize briefly the key tenets of this theory up front before going into the elements and their development in a little more detail. Essentially, social identity theory describes processes of social categorization into groups, followed by social comparison between these groups by people who define and identify themselves as members of one of these groups (a process of social identification). More specifically, the theory proposes that we derive value from our group memberships to the extent that we can compare our own group positively with others, and that we are therefore motivated to gain and maintain a sense of positive group distinctiveness from the other group(s) to which we do not belong, and against which we compare our own group (see Tajfel, 1978a; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, as we shall see further below, this is only the socio-motivational starting point for the theory. It is also important to take into account the nature of the social structure in which people and groups are embedded, and their positions in that structure.

Tajfel was not claiming that social identities were necessarily more important than other aspects of self and identity that were so prominent in the rest of psychology, but his point was that they might become important in “intergroup contexts” which can vary from the more mundane (e.g., being a fan at a football match) to the more consequential (being involved in a war between different nations or ethnic groups). Tajfel wrote of an interpersonal–intergroup continuum to represent situations in which group identities would become more or less salient and relevant. In characteristically intergroup contexts (an extreme case being intergroup conflicts such as wars), group identity could become very salient, and may become the dominant way of perceiving the self and others—in line with Tajfel’s own wartime experience (see also Moshman, Chapter 39, this volume).

A third component or process is crucial here and follows from the processes of social categorization and social identification. To categorize in-group and out-group and to identify with one’s own group entails social comparison between groups; indeed, social comparison is perhaps the only way we can assess the true meaning or value of our own group (we define our groups, and more generally who we are, partly by comparison with others). This theme was strongly developed subsequently within self-categorization theory. Here, the process of valuing one’s own group identity and deriving positive value from it implies and entails social comparison with other groups.

However, it would be mistaken to reduce social identity and the motivating force within social identity theory to a simple quest for positive value associated with one’s group identity (the so-called “self-esteem hypothesis,” which
we examine in more detail below). Although self-enhancement may play an important part in understanding social motivation, at least as important is the meaning accorded to identity, and the sense of group distinctiveness from other groups that this differentiated meaning provides. It not only provides us with a positive sense of esteem when comparisons are favorable, but it also provides us with a distinctive and meaningful identity, which is of value in itself in telling us who we are.

The tension between self-esteem and self-enhancement, on the one hand, and the quest for distinctiveness, on the other hand, has arguably remained somewhat unresolved within the theory (more later on this). However, these elements are combined and captured in the concept of positive group distinctiveness, which grew out of the early experimental work on minimal groups, from which the concept of social identity partly emerged. In the early demonstration of the “minimal group bias,” the fully fledged social identity theory was not yet developed, but the theory was introduced, in part, to explain these findings (e.g., Tajfel, Flament, Billig, & Bundy, 1971).

The Minimal Group Studies

In the minimal group paradigm, Tajfel and colleagues demonstrated that merely categorizing participants (school boys in the first studies) according to a trivial criterion (preference for different abstract painters such as Klee or Kandinsky), appeared to be sufficient to encourage them to allocate more resources (be these symbolic points or more material monetary rewards) to fellow in-group members than to out-group members. This happened despite the fact that participants did not know who these in-group and out-group members were (and thus they did not know whether they were in the same group as school friends and classmates). Moreover, self-interest seemed to be ruled out as an explanation because the rewards were allocated to other in-group individuals, not to groups as a whole, and so participants never allocated rewards directly or indirectly to themselves. Results showed that, as well as favoring the in-group, participants would maximize the difference in rewards favoring the in-group member over the out-group member, even at the cost of absolute rewards to the in-group (the so-called maximum difference strategy).

These findings, obtained in groups with no prior history or expected future, generated considerable controversy and interest that is still ongoing. In particular, the minimal group studies presented problems for prior models of inter-group conflict that were premised on the idea that discrimination arises from conflicts of interests between groups, and from competition over valued resources, as in realistic group conflict theory (e.g., Sherif, 1967). In the minimal group paradigm, there were no clear conflicts of interest between the groups, and so the basis of discrimination seemed to be more symbolic or purely social (thus labeled “social competition” by Turner, 1975).

Early attempts to explain the minimal in-group bias phenomenon in terms of a generic norm of competitive discrimination, characteristic of Western societies, quickly fell from favor, as it did not seem to explain such in-group bias adequately. Instead, the concept of social identity, and the motivated quest for positive group distinctiveness, was developed to account for these results (Spears, Jetten, Scheepers, & Cihangir, 2009; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 1978a). Thus, the emerging social identity theory moved beyond purely cognitive approaches to stereotyping and prejudice by adding the process of identification with one of the groups involved.

It is important to note, however, that there has been continuing debate and even controversy not just about the mechanism for minimal in-group bias, but also more fundamentally about what the findings actually show and how widely they can be generalized. Largely based on the results of the minimal group studies, social identity theory is often (mis)represented as providing evidence for a generic tendency to discriminate. This reputation seems to be based on the finding that people penalize out-group members even at the cost of (absolute) in-group gain (i.e., the
maximum difference strategy). However, rather than interpreting this as evidence for out-group derogation per se, Tajfel saw this as evidence of a differentiation strategy in line with the proposed motive to enhance group distinctiveness (see also Spears et al., 2009). The point is that discrimination may be the main (perhaps only) means to achieve positive differentiation in the minimal group context. In contrast, more benign or less malign forms of differentiation may be available in real world groups.

Despite evidence for the maximum difference strategy, the minimal group studies also show that participants display much stronger in-group favoritism than out-group derogation (see, e.g., Mullen, Brown & Smith, 1992). Consequently, some critics have argued that social identity theory is actually rather ill-placed to explain instances of out-group hate, as opposed to in-group love (Brewer, 1999). However, real life contexts may also incorporate strong threats to social identity (both in terms of distinctiveness and esteem) that can arguably help to explain more antagonistic strategies of differentiation and even discrimination in less minimal contexts (Spears, Jetten & Doosje, 2001).

In sum, social identity theory has a rather ambivalent relation to discrimination and prejudice, with some commentators suggesting it implies that all groups will be biased toward favoring their own members against others, and some suggesting it does not go far enough in explaining prejudice and out-group derogation. The reality may be more complex and contingent (and somewhere in between), providing good reason to seek further refinements, theoretical principles, and moderator variables, that can help us to explain the extremes and variability of intergroup prejudice and discrimination (and we return to this theme below when we consider the role of intergroup emotions, for example).

**Motives for Intergroup Discrimination**

Returning to explanations for the minimal group bias effect, early research tended to focus on the “positive” part of the positive differentiation construct—namely that people differentiate to enhance their social identity and thereby self-esteem (the “self-esteem hypothesis”; Abrams & Hogg, 1988). This focus is unfortunate because it neglects the role of group distinctiveness and thus arguably the group level of analysis (Spears, Jetten & Scheepers, 2002), leaving itself open to reductionist and individualistic interpretations for group motivations (i.e., that we seek positive group identities simply to advance personal agendas). The concept of distinctiveness is arguably more relational (and thus social) than the concept of esteem, in that one’s group is only distinctive in relation to some other group (which is not to deny that esteem can be comparative). And although we can of course be personally distinctive from other individuals (see also Vignoles, Chryssochou & Breakwell, 2000), group distinctiveness implies distinctiveness at the intergroup level. Perhaps the more important point to make here, though, is that social identity theory became somewhat bogged down in the (over)specification and assessment of the “self-esteem hypothesis,” and the validity of SIT became perhaps too identified with the sometimes mixed support for this hypothesis (Abrams & Hogg, 1988).

In some of my own work with others, we have tried to re-establish the importance of the group distinctiveness motive in the minimal group paradigm (Spears et al., 2009). However, it is also important to acknowledge that a range of other explanations have emerged for discrimination in minimal groups, in addition to self-esteem and distinctiveness processes. In particular, despite the attempts in the minimal group paradigm to rule out the role of self-interest and interdependence processes (e.g., rewarding others in anticipation of reciprocation from them), such explanations have made a comeback in recent years (e.g., Gaertner & Insko, 2000; Stroebe, Lodewijkx & Spears, 2005). This research shows that reciprocation motives do play an important role in explaining why people allocate more to the in-group, although if reciprocation (and anticipated self-interest) were the only factor it remains unclear why this is stronger in the case where people perceived themselves to be more
dependent on the in-group than on the out-group. In short, reciprocation per se does not seem to be the whole story and is also less well-placed to explain the Maximum Difference strategy than in-group favoritism.

Another motive proposed to explain in-group bias in this paradigm is the reduction of subjective uncertainty created by being a member of minimal groups (e.g., Mullin & Hogg, 1998). Despite some initial support for this account, there does not seem to be clear evidence that differentiation is caused or mediated by the need to reduce uncertainty. Moreover, relating in-group bias to such a basic individual motive leaves this account open to the same charge of reducing group processes to individual motives that has blighted the self-esteem hypothesis. In our own research focusing on the role of “creative distinctiveness” processes, we also measured uncertainty and found that this played little or no role in explaining intergroup differentiation. This research suggested that creating a distinctive and meaningful group identity was independent from the reduction of uncertainty, and explained intergroup differentiation and discrimination whereas uncertainty reduction did not (see Spears et al., 2009). In short, the original explanation for the minimal in-group bias effect, in terms of positive group distinctiveness, is supported.

Another influential theory that also puts the role of distinctiveness processes in relation to group identity center stage is Brewer’s (1991) optimal distinctiveness theory. In this theory, Brewer proposes that group identity provides a way of satisfying two very basic human needs and their associated motives, namely the needs for social inclusion (see also Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and for social differentiation. Because fulfilling inclusion and differentiation needs can work against each other, groups that are relatively small in size (e.g., minority groups) are proposed to optimally satisfy these competing motives. Here it is useful to contrast the meaning of group distinctiveness in ODT, which hinges on relative group size, with that in social identity theory, which refers to the motive to differentiate one’s own group, whatever its size, from others in the social context in terms of salient and relevant dimensions of comparison.

Although membership of a numerical minority can often be a distinctive and meaningful source of identity, and perhaps more so than in the case of majority groups, another sense of being a minority is in terms of lower power and status of one’s group. For example, Black South Africans in the Apartheid era were clearly in a numerical majority, but their ethnic identity was no less distinctive or important to them for that (indeed the injustice of their situation was arguably reinforced by their majority status in their historical homelands). Interest in the psychology of such disadvantaged “minorities” was a key preoccupation for Tajfel that motivated his development of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978a, 1978b).

Social Identity, Status Differences, and Social Change

Clearly, from such examples, it is not the case that people can always rely on their group memberships to afford them a positive (or distinctive) social identity. Nor, as the South African example also shows, can they always easily move to groups that will enhance their social identity. The broader social identity theory that developed in the wake of the minimal group studies was very much focused on the plight of disadvantaged groups—considering how they cope with their low-status position and with the negative social identity that this implies (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This identification with the disadvantaged was not accidental, but was consistent with Tajfel’s experience as a member of such a devalued minority. Social identity theory can thus be seen as a normative theory, in the sense that this term is used in political science—as a prescription of what ought to be, rather than what is. That is, it identifies with the disadvantaged, and tries to understand how such groups are motivated to change their position for the better (Tajfel, 1978a, 1978b). In this respect, social identity theory is designed to explain social change (from social inequality to greater equality). Nevertheless, because it also specifies the
conditions where this is more or less likely, it is also equipped to account for social stability and stasis. In these terms, the concept of social identity can be seen as an intervening variable that helps to explain the processes of change or stability from the perspective of disadvantaged social groups.

In the first full statement of social identity theory, Tajfel and Turner (1979; see also Ellemers, 1993) set out the different strategies open to disadvantaged groups (and although there is an emphasis on the plight and motives of the disadvantaged group, the reactions of higher-status groups to attempts at social change are not ignored). They proposed that a range of different strategies may be available, depending on group members’ appraisals of the possibilities in the situation, as well as the importance of their group identity to them. For example, one possible strategy is that of social mobility (more accurately, individual mobility), which involves simply moving to a higher status group. This point makes clear that social identity theory does not always mechanically predict social competition and social change. Indeed, these strategies may well only be considered when other (perhaps easier) avenues to a more positive social identity have been closed off. Social mobility depends on group boundaries being permeable and this is not always the case—this may be easier in the case of class than in the case of “race,” caste, or gender, for example.

Social mobility is characterized as an individualistic strategy, in the sense that it is unlikely to change the status quo in any meaningful way that will help the group as a whole, and it leads to “tokenism” that may only help a few individuals (Wright, 1997). At the other extreme, more group-level strategies may become salient under certain conditions that foster the salience of group identity and intergroup comparisons. Whereas the interpersonal end of the interpersonal–intergroup continuum is associated with individualism and “social mobility beliefs,” the intergroup end of this continuum is more likely to focus on “social change beliefs.” However, in this event, group members must be able to conceive of “cognitive alternatives to the status quo”—the notion that change is not just desired, but also possible. For this to happen, Tajfel and Turner (1979) suggest that group members must perceive the status relations between the groups to be illegitimate and also unstable. Social comparisons based on these appraisals are said to be insecure (because change is desired and also conceivable), and it is in such circumstances that low-status groups are likely to challenge the status hierarchy (and where we might also expect most resistance from the insecure high-status group).

In cases where cognitive alternatives to the status quo are not conceivable, and neither social mobility nor direct social competition is an option, disadvantaged groups might adopt instead various “social creativity” strategies that address their negative status by framing it more positively (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). For example, they could choose a more favorable dimension of comparison, a different comparison group, redefine the negative stigma of their low status (“black is beautiful”), or indeed redefine the group identity (“I am not Black, I am British”). Some of these may seem cosmetic strategies that do little to change the status relations (and more ideologically, they may even reinforce these relations). However, more positively, such strategies may also offer subtle forms of resistance that serve to undermine perceptions of the status quo or build for more “revolutionary” strategies when they become available. For example, the slogan “Black is beautiful” did not change the deprivation of Black Americana in itself. However, it may well have contributed to consciousness raising, strengthening the collective esteem, confidence, and solidarity within this group, and thus it may have helped to motivate and justify more active and confrontational forms of resistance when the moment came.

To summarize, social identity theory is not just a theory that explains discrimination and why groups are nasty to each other (although it has much to say about this). More positively, it is a theory of social change with an implicit agenda of equality and liberation (which is not to say that change is always easy or the process pleasant). Although social identity theory is primarily
a theory of intergroup relations, it necessarily introduced the concept of social identity, which, although modestly theorized at first, was the first specifically social psychological attempt to theorize group identity as a part of the self-concept or self-definition. Self-categorization theory moved this theoretical agenda further forward on a broader front, and we now turn to this theoretical framework.

**Self-Categorization Theory**

Self-categorization theory was developed by John Turner and his students (Turner, 1982; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), and grew out of the social identity tradition that he had been involved in developing. If social identity theory is primarily a theory of intergroup relations, self-categorization theory can be seen as a more general theory of the self, of *intragroup* as well as *intergroup* processes—possibly as close as we come in contemporary social psychology to a grand theory. More explicitly than social identity theory, self-categorization theory proposes that there is not just one self or self-concept, but many different group, and also personal selves, corresponding to different comparative contexts (Turner et al., 1987). Whereas social identity theory posited an interpersonal–intergroup continuum to address the salience of social identity, self-categorization theory conceptualizes the self at different levels of abstraction (e.g., personal, group, human). As such it also addresses issues of identity salience (when and why a particular self becomes relevant and operative), social influence (as a group process), attraction (distinguishing interpersonal attraction from attraction to others because of their shared in-group membership), group formation, leadership, and (together with social identity theory) collective behavior, just to name a few of the social phenomena to which it has been applied. So, as a general theory of the self, self-categorization theory is applicable to the personal as well as the group level of self-definition, and there have indeed been attempts to understand personality and the individual self through the prism of this theory (e.g., Turner & Onorato, 1999).

**Self and Self-Definition**

To start with the more fundamental issue of self-definition relevant to the current volume, self-categorization theory makes the distinction between personal and group identity more explicit than was the case in social identity theory. Initially grounded in more traditional notions of self-concept, social identity theory theorized social identity as one part of the self-concept. Perhaps more radically, self-categorization theory views personal and group identities as different levels of self-categorization (or levels of abstraction), and thus self-definition can extend in a more inclusive direction (such as identification with superordinate groups or ultimately with humanity as a whole) and even downwards within the personal self (such as the “true” or “authentic” self; see also Waterman, Chapter 16, this volume).

Moreover, just as we may have a wide repertoire of group identities available to us (psychology student, male, family member, etc.), so too may we have a number of different personal selves corresponding to different contexts of comparison (Spears, 2001; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994): myself as a brother, myself in relation to my student peers, selves in the context of friendship group A versus B, etc. (for a similar account, see Chen, Boucher, & Kraus, Chapter 7, this volume). Brewer and Gardner (1996) conceptualized these forms of self in terms of a third category of “relational” self (see also Sedikides & Brewer, 2001). However, from a self-categorization perspective, self-definition is always relational and comparative, be this (inter)group or (inter)personal, and so a third form of self is not necessary (see Spears, 2001). In this respect, self-categorization theory is not just about groups. However, it is also true that group memberships can influence and inform personal identities in certain important ways. For example, as the sociologist Simmel (1955) noted, the same attributes that can define a group identity when shared with others (e.g., the left-wing group, the students, or the extroverts) can define individual identity in an interpersonal comparative context (e.g., unlike my sister, I am left-wing, a student, and an introvert).
By replacing the interpersonal–intergroup continuum of social identity theory with a more hierarchical structure, the number of forms of self can extend vertically and horizontally, encompassing different instantiations of personal and group selves with a theoretically unbounded variety of contextually contingent contents (e.g., self-stereotypes, attributes). It is clear here that the role of social comparison is every bit as central to self-categorization theory as it is to social identity theory. The process of social comparison is also central to determining which identities become salient in which contexts.

As we shall see, self-categorization theory has been influential in providing a theoretical grounding and impetus to a range of research areas. These include: helping to explain the mechanisms whereby group identity becomes salient; providing a more psychological basis to processes of group formation than was available previously; elaborating the processes involved in group influence and collective behavior; and elaborating the relation of the individual to the group in general (relevant to processes of group-based social attraction, and of leadership and followership). I address a few key topics.

**Identity Salience**

Following Bruner (1957b), Oakes (1987) proposed that the salience of a given (group) identity is a product of the “perceptual readiness” (or accessibility) of the relevant categorization and its “fit” to the underlying social reality (or how well the categories capture or map on to that reality in a given context). Thus, social categorizations that maximally differentiate between two groups (so that the differences between them outweigh the differences within groups) are said to have a high “comparative fit” (I elaborate a second form of fit below). Perceptual readiness is determined by a psychological predisposition to perceive a particular social category as salient, which includes not only perceiver variables (e.g., motivation, degree of identification), but also past perceived fit between the social stimuli and the social categorizations used to order them. The fit is contextually determined, so this may vary depending on which groups are included in the frame of reference and on the dimensions available to distinguish them.

Consider, for example, a discussion between a group of men and women sampled from Britain and the Netherlands (Lea, Spears, & Watt, 2007). If the topic of conversation centers on attitudes toward the European Union, it may well be that nationality becomes more salient, because British people tend to be more anti-Europe, and Dutch people tend to be more pro-Europe. However, if the topic of conversation turns to expressing one’s feelings in relationships, or whether there should be more football on TV, then gender identity may become more salient (I leave the distribution of fit here to your stereotypic imagination for the moment). From this example, it is easy to see that the salience of identity is highly contingent on the social context, and can shift quite quickly as the context changes.

The meta-contrast principle provides a way of calculating the fit in the context: meta-contrast is maximized to the extent that between-group differences are large and within-group differences are small on a given dimension. The higher the meta-contrast, the higher the likelihood that the categorization will become salient. Comparative fit refers to fit derived from these perceived differences in context. However, a second form of fit, “normative fit,” is based on the meaning or the content associated with the social categories, and whether such differences are typical of the social categorization based on prior expectations (e.g., stereotypes). Put another way, comparative fit is just about group difference per se, whereas normative fit incorporates expectations about the direction or content of these differences, providing a link to the other source of salience based on perceiver readiness (see above). To return to the above example, we might stereotypically expect women to be better at talking about their feelings than men, but men to be more interested in watching football on TV, and these expectations may predispose us to pick up on this relation, especially when it is confirmed.
Social Stereotyping (Versus Prejudice) and Depersonalization

The concept of fit and the meta-contrast principle have proved enormously heuristic in a range of areas. The application to social stereotyping is perhaps already obvious from the above examples (see Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994). According to this view, the stereotyping process is not about accessing fixed schemas from memory about “how groups are” (although such knowledge might contribute to perceiver readiness), but more about constructing what the appropriate and relevant stereotypes of groups should be in context. This is not to deny that we have stereotypic expectations about many groups that we can and do use (as the concept of normative fit described above makes clear). The point here is that the precise meaning of a given stereotype might only become clear in a specific comparative context.

For example, what is the stereotype of psychology students? Well this may depend on to whom we compare this group. Compared to physics students they may seem quite creative (but perhaps less intelligent), whereas compared to art school students they may seem quite intelligent (but perhaps less creative; Spears, Doosje, & Ellemers, 1997). When the context is taken into account, stereotypes may be useful and even relatively accurate ways of capturing social reality in context. However, when they are used as generic templates to characterize groups (e.g., as schemas or other stored representations), this flexible link to social reality may be lost. It is for this reason that self-categorization theorists have criticized the conceptualization of stereotypes as primarily stored representations or knowledge structures (Oakes et al., 1994). But this is not to deny the role of relevant knowledge in generating the most meaningful stereotypes in context, as I will discuss below.

According to self-categorization theory, stereotyping is not just about perceiving out-groups, but also about perceiving the self and the in-group. In principle, we attribute stereotypes and beliefs about groups to our own groups and ourselves, in the same way that we attribute these to others when in a salient intergroup context. Of course this is not to say that the stereotypes a group has of itself will be the same as those an out-group has of it; groups are very likely to resist negative and prejudiced stereotypes that others have of them (Haslam, Turner, Oakes, Reynolds, & Doosje, 2002; Spears, Greenwood, De Lemos, & Sweetman, 2010). This may sometimes simply involve a different evaluation of the same descriptive dimension. Thus, an anti-Semitic stereotype of Jews as scheming or cunning may be represented by non-prejudiced people and by Jewish people themselves in terms of more positive competence dimensions (e.g., intelligent; cf. Peabody, 1968). The motivation to positively differentiate the in-group (based on social identity theory) may also determine the choice of dimension. For the earlier example, psychology students may prefer the dimension of creativity to differentiate themselves from physics students (even though intelligence may generate a similar comparative fit; Spears et al., 1997). Similarly, Scottish people are more likely to see themselves as warm when comparing themselves to the English than when comparing themselves to Greeks (Hopkins, Regan, & Abell, 1997).

When a particular intergroup dimension becomes salient, the perception of self and other is likely to become “depersonalized,” in the sense that people see each other (including themselves) as interchangeable representatives of the salient category on relevant (stereotypic) dimensions, rather than as unique individuals. A good example, used by Oakes et al. (1994), is the case of miners confronting the police during the UK miner’s strike of 1984. In this context, the demonstrators were not likely to perceive themselves as unique individuals, but rather as miners fighting for their jobs. Similarly, the policemen confronting them were unlikely to be seen by the miners as unique individuals with different hobbies and interests (even if they knew what these hobbies and interests were), but as functionally equivalent representatives of their group (helped admittedly by features of the situation, such as the police uniforms, the territorial organization, etc.).

Viewed in this way, social stereotyping is not a biased or distorted process, as it has often been
represented in social psychology and in the cognitive tradition described earlier (see Oakes & Turner, 1990; Spears & Haslam, 1997). Rather, it is a functional, adaptive, rational process reflecting (group-level) social reality. Nor is stereotyping intrinsically related to prejudice. Admittedly, stereotypes can be used strategically to justify particular prejudicial group relations that reinforce one group’s power or status at the expense of another (Tajfel, 1981). But equally, self or in-group stereotypes can also be used as resources to contest particular patterns of intergroup relations on the part of disadvantaged groups (Haslam et al., 2002; Spears et al., 2009). The point to make here is that it is analytically useful to distinguish stereotypes and stereotyping from the processes involved in prejudice and discrimination. Although stereotyping can be used to reinforce prejudice, it does not follow that all stereotyping is prejudiced.

To illustrate this point, it might be useful to examine further the prejudice toward Jews and the stereotypes associated with this. Anti-Semitic conspiracy theories have historically painted Jews as money-lending capitalists (but also sometimes as communists), using their intelligence and cunning to exploit gentiles and others. To the extent that intelligence forms a part of this stereotype, Jews are likely to be seen as a threat or to be the target of envy (or envious prejudice in the terms of the stereotype content model; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). However, intelligence is not in itself a negative stereotypic attribute. Moreover, the stereotype of money lending derives from a history of anti-Semitism in which Jews were denied the right to own property and businesses and so had to resort to money lending as one of the few forms of commerce open to them. In short, the history of prejudice and discrimination toward Jews arguably produced the basis for the stereotypic content that emerged, rather than the reverse.

By contrast, until recently, bankers as a group did not suffer from obvious negative stereotypes and prejudice. A similar content to the Jewish stereotypes of intelligence and financial acumen (and bankers are undeniably a group of capitalists) was arguably regarded more neutrally or even positively for this group. The current financial crisis has changed this, such that bankers are now widely considered greedy, self-interested, and manipulative (albeit perhaps now somewhat less competent). Once again, there is a social reality underlying these stereotypes, but the stereotypes themselves do not explain the shift in evaluation of this group (i.e., prejudice). Other aspects of the intergroup relations (e.g., perceived threats to group interests or values caused by a crisis they had a hand in creating) help to explain how prejudice can inform the interpretation of the associated social stereotypes.

The more general point here is that not all stereotypes are negative or prejudiced, as the examples of positive in-group stereotypes described above already illustrate. Moreover, even positive stereotypes can be linked to prejudice in any case, as in the example of intelligence for the Jewish stereotype, and as is also shown by benevolent or paternalistic forms of sexism and racism. More neutrally then, stereotyping is simply group-level social perception that takes the relevant and fitting dimensions of group difference that are apparent in the context to make sense of that situation (although social reality also allows room for motivated choices and evaluation of the dimensions). Indeed, stereotyping at the group level would not be appropriate or relevant in more interpersonal contexts where group-based fit is low. So, for example, the investment banker who goes home after work is probably quite thankful that her family are more likely to see her as a wife, a mother, and an individual person, rather than as a member of a greedy and self-interested group responsible for the global financial meltdown.

**Social Influence**

As well as being relevant to social perception generally, self-categorization principles have also been applied successfully to the realm of social influence in various ways. An important illustrative example is the case of group polarization (Turner, 1991; Wetherell, 1987). Group polarization is the phenomenon whereby a group
becomes more extreme in its collective viewpoint after discussing a topic in the group. So, suppose that the discussion topic is the proposal that we need to combat global warming by building more nuclear power stations. Suppose that the average of individual opinions prior to discussion was moderately in disagreement with this proposal. After group discussion these individual opinions would typically shift to a more extreme or polarized view (i.e., more strongly against), as would the collective consensus during the group discussion.

This phenomenon presented something of a puzzle to social psychology for many decades, with much debate over different possible mechanisms. The central question was why a group should become more extreme when classical conformity processes would suggest that people should converge around the mean of the group members’ positions. The key insight provided by self-categorization theory was that social influence involves intergroup as well as intragroup processes (just as applied to salience and stereotyping). Although there is not an explicit out-group present when a group discusses a topic, there is an implied out-group represented by the non-preferred side of the scale used to represent positions. Thus, if a group of students is discussing nuclear power as an energy option, and are generally against this technology, then there is an implicit comparison with those not present who represent the pro-nuclear position. Using the meta-contrast principle, it is then possible to calculate what the “prototypical” position of the group will be. This takes into account not only similarities within the in-group, but also differences with the implied out-group, such that the prototypical position is shifted to the anti-nuclear pole.

This approach helps to explain convergence on an extremitized position that captures both intergroup and intragroup dynamics through a process of referent informational influence. This account of social influence transcends earlier dualistic accounts of social influence such as the dual process model (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955), in which social influence in groups is viewed as reflecting either informational or normative influence. According to the dualistic view, informational influence is true influence (leading to private acceptance) whereas normative influence, more characteristic of group contexts, is simply compliance with the group designed to gain rewards, or to avoid the punishment or disapproval that might result from rejecting the group’s view (“you go along to get along” so to speak). The term, “referent informational influence” is intended to capture the idea that influence has both informational and normative dimensions, but is different from informational and normative influence as conceptualized by this dual process account.

As may be clear by now, the dual process model reflects a largely negative picture of the group—a portrayal that is not shared by self-categorization theory. Because groups are in part aspects of self (at least for high identifiers), social influence in the group does not operate through a sheep-like group pressure to comply. Rather, social influence operates through a willing process of learning the group’s position and making it one’s own (“social validation”). Thus, social influence in the group can be internal and willing rather than external and forced. In cases where compliance is external and forced, this does not reflect true social influence, but rather reflects power and compliance. The process of referent informational influence proceeds as follows.

People categorize themselves as members of a social group or category (i.e., self-categorization or social identification), they learn or infer the norms and attributes associated with that group or category, and they then apply these to themselves. The prototypical position, not necessarily the group mean, will be the most influential. Much evidence has now accumulated to support this view in a range of classical group influence paradigms (e.g., Abrams, Wetherell, Cochran, Hogg, & Turner, 1990; Turner, 1991).

As well as being applied to the field of social influence, self-categorization principles have also been applied to a variety of other areas that are closely associated with influence processes. Because of space limitations, I will give just two examples, in the domains of leadership and collective behavior, before moving on to consider
Leadership. The question of leadership, and how to explain and understand it, is an important topic within social psychology but extends well beyond and into organizational behavior, management studies, and political science (see also Haslam & Ellemers, Chapter 30, this volume). Traditional psychological approaches to leadership have tried to capture the essence of what makes good or effective leaders in various ways, either in terms of defining the profile of good leaders (e.g., trait-based approaches) or trying to define some ideal leadership style or syndrome. One failing of such prescriptive approaches is that there is often not an ideal leader type that fits all situations or groups. This is where the more contextualist approach provided by self-categorization theory has an advantage. One theme developed by a number of researchers within this tradition, but already contained within the original statements of self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987), is that leaders will emerge who best represent the prototype of the group (see, e.g., Van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003). Importantly, SCT suggests that there will not be one ideal type of leader; it could well be that the same person who might represent an ideal leader in one time and place by being seen as best representing the group norms and needs (i.e., prototypical) may not be seen as prototypical of the group in another time or place that provides a different comparative context.

For example, the Conservative Winston Churchill was seen by many British people as the ideal, the archetypal, wartime prime minister (and despite having been seen as something of a maverick before the war). However, as soon as the war was over, Clement Attlee’s Labour government swept to power: a new leader and a new team for new times. Of course, it would be oversimplifying matters to claim that Attlee and the Labour Party were more prototypical of Britain, but they seemed to capture the mood of social change in the wake of the war. The concept of prototypicality has provided a rich seam that has been mined by increasing numbers of researchers working on leadership as well as other areas. It is also a theme in our second illustrative topic: crowd behavior and collective action.

Crowd behavior and collective action. What about situations where there is no clear leader? This is often the case in crowd dynamics. The social identity approach has provided a rich resource for scholars trying to explain the social behavior of crowds. In particular, the work of Steve Reicher and his collaborators has done much to advance our understanding of these processes and, as we shall see, has extended and developed the social identity approach in the process. Explaining crowd behavior appears difficult because a crowd can act in distinct but uniform ways despite the absence of a clear leader or chain of command. Traditional approaches, dating back to the influential writing of Gustav Le Bon, 1995, viewed the crowd as inherently fickle and dangerous, and proposed that individuals lost their identity and their rationality in the crowd, succumbing to primitive instincts contained within the nature of the group (the “group mind”). These claims, although dubious and unsubstantiated, greatly influenced subsequent researchers who developed the concept of “deindividuation” to give such claims a more scientific grounding (Diener, 1980; Festinger, Pepitone & Newcomb, 1952; Prentice-Dunn & Rogers, 1989; Zimbardo, 1969).

However, such accounts that pathologize behavior in the crowd neglect the clearly social basis of crowd behavior, which often emerges in intergroup contexts, within a clear historical context. Not every crowd is predisposed to riot, and some may have strong norms that preclude this type of behavior (such as a peace rally, for example). Reicher (1987) proposed that, instead of losing one’s identity or self in the crowd, there was rather a switch to a social identity. Crowds are, after all, groups, albeit often loosely formed or defined, but the crucial process here is one of social identification or self-categorization: do the members of the crowd see themselves as a meaningful group? In contrast to the deindividuation explanation in terms of loss of self (or reduced self-awareness in subsequent accounts), the social identity/self-categorization explanation...
argues for the switch to a social identity and depersonalization in the intergroup context. This process of depersonalization helps to explain the uniform behavior, a process that can be accentuated by a sense of anonymity in the crowd (as we shall see in the next section).

This shared identity is an important point that separates the crowd from mere crowding (the more incidental assembly of large numbers of people who do not share a common identity or common goals). In the case of crowds that share a common identity, this identity will give important guides to inform behavior even in the absence of explicit leadership. Reicher (1987) drew on the distinction between the inductive and deductive aspects of stereotyping within self-categorization theory to help explain what behavior is appropriate and normative in the group. The deductive aspect of stereotyping refers to a top-down inference of appropriate conduct based on knowledge of the stereotypes and norms associated with a group identity. However, by their very nature, crowds often find themselves in unexpected situations where behavior is not clearly prescribed. Here, the inductive aspects of stereotyping become relevant: crowd members infer appropriate group norms from behavior that emerges in context.

At first, this argument looks quite similar to the “emergent norm” explanation of crowd behavior (R. H. Turner & Killian, 1957). However, the missing element in that explanation is precisely the guiding influence of a group identity. According to the emergent norm account, appropriate behavior is inferred from salient actions of crowd members and transmitted through essentially interpersonal transmission processes (e.g., rumor). However, because there is no analysis in terms of group identity within the emergent norm perspective, there is little potential to explain which actions will become normative and which will not. Ironically, then, there is a danger that this explanation falls back onto some of the mindless accounts of automatic contagion that it was designed to transcend. The social identity account, on the other hand, provides a normative context that helps to determine which forms behavior will take, and which will likely be rejected by the crowd. Thus, the inductive process of stereotyping is not arbitrary but must be prototypical of the group identity to some degree. For these reasons, we are unlikely to see violence and riots at a peace rally, even in the presence of elements who are agitating for violence (e.g., individuals or subgroups with a different agenda, for example—agents provocateurs). Violent behavior is unlikely to become widespread in such crowds, and a high degree of restraint and self-policing around identity-consistent norms is likely to result.

Indeed, Reicher has shown that even where crowds do engage in violence, this often takes constrained, socially structured forms that make sense in the context of the intergroup conflicts concerned. Thus, in his St. Paul’s riot study, Reicher (1984) showed that those involved did not attack property indiscriminately, but avoided local shops and attacked what they saw as symbols of external exploitation (e.g., banks, police vehicles). This was not a spontaneous uprising, but rather was sparked by a heavy-handed raid by the police on a local black community café that was widely seen as an attack on the community as a whole. In short rather than the mad-mob of Le Bon’s characterization, and as developed in deindividuation theory, a closer inspection and analysis of crowds and even riots reveals a much more mindful and rational pattern of behavior that can be traced back to the intergroup context and the norms associated with group identities. A meta-analysis of the deindividuation literature confirms that the effect of the classic deindividuation variables such as anonymity and group immersion can better be explained by conformity to local (group) norms than in terms of mindless anti-normative and antisocial behavior (Postmes & Spears, 1998).

Developments and Extensions of the Social Identity Approach

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the social identity approach, comprising both social identity and self-categorization theory, has been influential well beyond the disciplinary borders
of social psychology. However, the basic ideas and principles have also been influential in generating theoretical developments that build on the basic principles provided by this framework. We have already encountered some examples of this. For example, uncertainty identity theory (see, e.g., Mullin & Hogg, 1998) has its roots in the self-categorization explanations of social influence (referent informational influence) in which people experience uncertainty when they disagree with others with whom they expect to agree (e.g., fellow in-group members) and resolve this through social validation and social influence. In this section, I consider some examples of approaches that have extended the social identity approach in various ways to gain further insights into specific phenomena or domains.

**Intragroup Dynamics and the “Black Sheep Effect”**

Because self-categorization theory moved beyond the intergroup focus of social identity theory, it put the relation of the individual to the group—and intragroup relations—back on the research agenda. Although group identity is correctly seen as that part, or level, of self that comes into play in intergroup contexts and intergroup relations, it would be wrong to think that intragroup processes or dynamics necessarily become less relevant or salient in such contexts. Self-categorization theory has already made the interplay between the intragroup and the intergroup levels clear in the field of social influence and especially in the explanation of group polarization: we are influenced most by those who best represent the group but this depends not only on who is most typical of the in-group in isolation (an intragroup comparison), but also relative to the most relevant and salient out-group (an intergroup comparison). Self-categorization theory thereby opened up the way to reexamine (intra)group dynamics.

When considering the interplay between intragroup and intergroup dynamics, some very interesting findings began to emerge which at first sight seem problematic and even contradictory from a social identity perspective. As we know, from the perspective of social identity theory, people tend to favor members of their own group, to reward them more, and evaluate them more positively than out-group members. Marques, Yzerbyt, and Leyens (1988) identified an important exception to this principle by showing that when in-group members are disliked in some way, they would be judged more harshly than equivalent out-group members. They called this the “Black Sheep effect.”

However, as Marques and colleagues have also noted, the potential for negative in-group members to undermine a positive in-group identity does not contradict the more general tendency to show in-group bias, but rather might be seen as another manifestation of in-group favoritism. Rejecting people who reflect poorly on one’s group is therefore one way of protecting the group’s image, and policing its boundaries (and indeed the harsh treatment of “imposters” by the group can be seen in a similar light; Horsey & Jetten, 2003). The subjective group dynamics model further developed these ideas by extending such arguments from small face-to-face groups to larger social categories, again focusing on the tendency to distance or differentiate the group from normative deviants (“black sheep”) within the group (Marques, Abrams, & Serôdio, 2001). Once again, the fact that norms differentiate in-groups from out-groups means that derogating in-group deviants represents a way of preserving the normative validity of in-group identity, and indeed superiority, which is why in-group deviants are judged especially critically.

**Depersonalization, Deindividuation, and the SIDE Model**

I now consider some ways in which the social identity approach has been further developed to help understand various aspects of group behavior in particular kinds of groups, namely crowds, but also more “virtual” groups such as those communicating via e-mail or the Internet. At first, one might consider these two kinds of groups to be as different as one can possibly get. Moreover,
one might question whether these are indeed groups at all, in a traditional sense. Crowds tend to be quite loose and momentary collections of people, and computer-based groups are often so dispersed and visually anonymous that, albeit for different reasons, one could question whether there are sufficiently strong bonds to connect such groups. However, as noted earlier, we know that crowds can engage in quite intense and sometimes extreme forms of (inter)group behavior. It turns out that the apparently weak ties of computer-based groups are not always associated with weaker group effects than face-to-face groups either. Indeed there are interesting parallels between these two domains given the scope for collective coordination and mobilization using the new communications technologies such as CMC/e-mail, Internet and mobile phones, and now Facebook and Twitter as well. Part of the problem, creating the expectations that these are not clear or strong groups, is the traditional conception of a group as the sum of interpersonal bonds between people (an example of an “interdependence” approach to group definition).

The social identity model of deindividuation effects (SIDE for short; Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995; Spears & Lea, 1994) was developed in order to understand how sometimes quite strong group effects could emerge from groups that are often momentary and dispersed, as in these examples. This model grew out of Reicher’s work on collective behavior described earlier and was further developed in an attempt to understand the effect of anonymity in computer-mediated communication. We already noted that one effect of anonymity in the crowd was that it can enhance depersonalization and the salience of group identity by reducing the focus on individual differences. Reicher (1984) demonstrated this idea in an experimental social influence study. He showed that rendering groups anonymous by clothing them in uniforms and hoods (a classic deindividuation manipulation) could produce greater conformity to group norms—thereby contradicting classical deindividuation theory, which predicted more anti-normative behavior in cases of group immersion and anonymity.

Spears, Lea, and Lee (1990) extended this idea to the case of computer-mediated communication. In this study, groups of three psychology students all communicated via computer but they were either located in the same room and thus visible to each other, or were located in separate rooms and thus visually anonymous. In a second manipulation, either we made personal identity salient by stating that the study was concerned with individual differences in personality and communication styles, or we made group identity salient by indicating that we were only interested in the psychology students as a group. We found that group members discussing a topic by means of anonymous CMC were more likely to conform to a polarized group norm (an example of the group polarization phenomenon discussed earlier) when a shared group identity was salient. This is an example of depersonalization (conformity to a group norm under conditions where a group identity is salient and where individual identity and individual differences are not salient)—quite a different process to that of deindividuation (anti-normative behavior due to reduced self-awareness and impaired self-regulation). When individual identity was salient, and the people were visually anonymous, they actually differentiated themselves from the group and contrasted their view against this group norm, consistent with affirming this level of identity.

What is perhaps most interesting about demonstrating this effect of anonymity in the CMC context is that people are acting more in line with group identity (provided this identity is salient), even when isolated from other group members, in contrast to the physical immersion in the group or crowd. This point brings home the power and pervasiveness of group identity: we can be just as much part of the group psychologically even when we are apparently physically removed from it. In a similar way, a woman who reads about a case of blatant sex discrimination in the paper may feel strongly identified with this woman (and women in general) despite having no personal bond with the victim. This also helps to explain the phenomenon of “homegrown terrorists” in the United States and the
United Kingdom; although the 7/7/05 bombers were born in Britain they were clearly radicalized by, and felt that they were a part of, an intergroup conflict playing out well beyond their own shores (Iraq, Afghanistan). This also illustrates the key difference between the social identity approach to the group, and traditional approaches that view the group as a physical structure, as the sum of interpersonal relations or bonds between group members.

The finding that depersonalization caused by anonymity or isolation can actually enhance the effects of group identity may be viewed as a cognitive or psychological effect. However, the effect of anonymity versus identifiability to others can be complex and may have different kinds of effects that we call “strategic.” The strategic dimension is concerned with how we express or present our identities depending on our identifiability and thus accountability to different audiences. The cognitive effect of anonymity discussed above refers to the effect of the anonymity of group members resulting in the reduced salience of within-group differences (depersonalization). However, there are also potential effects of anonymity to others, in contrast with the case where we might be visible and thus accountable for our conduct to others. Put another way: when I cannot see others (“anonymity of”) I cannot distinguish between them, and so am likely to base my image of the group on prototypical expectations of what the group is like (increasing group salience); when the others cannot see me (“anonymity to”), I do not have to worry about conforming to the expectations others may have of me, as a group member (a strategic issue). When I am visible, however, I may feel more accountable to the audience. If this is an out-group audience, I may have to be more careful how I behave, especially if in-group norms or tendencies offend the out-group, which social identity theory tells us they sometimes might.

The power dimension between groups becomes particularly relevant here. Once again, this analysis grew out of a critique of the deindividuation literature, and its concern with crowd behavior. In this case, the question was how anonymity to (rather than of) both the in- and the out-group can affect our motivation and ability to express group identities and to behave in preferred ways. In intergroup relations structured by power differences, powerless in-group members are likely to be wary of challenging powerful out-groups when they are visible and accountable to them, but they might be more assertive when more anonymous, or when empowered by the co-presence of like-minded others (Reicher & Levine, 1994a, 1994b).

What the strategic dimension makes clear is that group identities are not just a passive reflection of reality, but rather are negotiated in a struggle to contest reality. Factors such as anonymity and co-presence are just two contextual factors that contribute to the distribution and dance of forces. The SIDE analysis also extends traditional work on the strategic processes of self-presentation and impression management in social psychology. Because this work was grounded in an individualistic meta-theory of the self, which has traditionally been prevalent in social psychology, it failed to appreciate the (inter)group dimension to such strategic behavior.

Recent research and theorizing in this tradition has elaborated this strategic element to behavior. Specifically Scheepers, Spears, Doosje, and Manstead (2006) have developed these ideas by delineating the functions that can be served by social identity processes such as in-group bias and discrimination when communicating to in-group or out-group audiences. They identified an “identity expression” function often associated with high-status groups displaying their superior status or group worth through in-group bias. That is, when one’s group already has a positive social value (i.e., high status), one only has to express that value, which favors one’s group, to derive a positive social identity. By contrast, disadvantaged or low-status groups have little to gain by expressing the ascribed value of their low status. They are more likely to discriminate against high-status groups as part of a process of challenging them and changing the status quo, in line with the classical social identity principles described earlier. This is more consistent with an “instrumental function” for in-group bias.
Developing this line of argument, Klein, Spears, and Reicher (2007) distinguish “identity consolidating” and “identity mobilizing” functions for strategic identity performance. Often, these functions and motives for when and why to express identity in forms of intergroup behavior will not be mutually exclusive: to express an identity is also to make a statement and this may be directed toward certain goals or ends. More fundamentally, this point illustrates that identities are not just cognitive representations in the head. In this respect, although social identities may, to a large degree, reflect social reality, and may be constrained by this reality, expressions of identity through group behavior such as differentiation, and even discrimination, are also a means of changing reality (for low-status groups) or maintaining the status quo (for high-status groups) in ways that affirm group identity and advance group goals. In this respect, group identity is not just about “being” but also about “becoming” (Spears et al., 2001), in line with the normative social change agenda of social identity theory.

The Elaborated Social Identity Model

To see identities as a source of, and resource for, action is also only a partial account to the extent that it neglects the fact that social identities emerge out of, and through, action. This theme is central to another extension of social identity theory, the elaborated social identity model (ESIM; e.g., Drury & Reicher, 2000, 2009). ESIM was developed to further extend the social identity analysis of collective behavior and to explain how collective action not only depends on social identity, but also can transform group identity through practice. In this program of research, the methods and theory move us far beyond the laboratory and the minimal group paradigm, quite literally into the field in many cases. ESIM takes seriously Tajfel’s (1978) original injunction that social identity is an intervening variable in the process of social change and as such is negotiated and contested.

How does collective action shape identity? This can happen in various ways, but three key themes can be highlighted in the research. First, consistent with the strategic dimension of the SIDE model, research on protest actions illustrates the effects of empowerment. That is, the presence of co-acting others gives a sense of support and efficacy to one’s actions, bolstering and transforming identity in the process. This process of becoming aware of a shared identity, and the power associated with it, has been referred to as “collective self-realization” or “collective self-objectification” (Drury & Reicher, 2009).

Second, such action occurs in the context of intergroup relations in which the out-group authority plays a central role in galvanizing this in-group identity by the way in which it treats the in-group. This idea is reminiscent of Althusser’s (1984) notion of “interpellation:” how we are addressed by others, especially powerful outsiders, is likely to affect how we see ourselves and how we act in response. However, as well as reinforcing power relations as Althusser proposed, this can also radicalize those who become aware of how they are (mis)treated. For example, if the police view protesters as generic lawbreakers and treat them accordingly, then this is likely to unite all those treated in this way, including those who did not initially identify themselves in such radical terms (Drury & Reicher, 2000; for a related idea, see also Stepick et al., Chapter 37, this volume). Whereas the SIDE model looks at the way we present ourselves to certain audiences, ESIM goes a step further and considers how the way in which these audiences see us might feed back into “oppositional” group identities. The role of meta-cognition and meta-stereotypes, how we think others perceive us, the behavior this encourages, and the self-fulfilling cycles this can produce, plays a key role in this process.

Third, the experience of the physical, sensuous, and embodied aspects of being in the group (chanting, rituals, and other coordinated group actions) are likely to bolster the sense of group identity and of oneness with others (Novelli & Drury, 2009). In short, although psychology has often conceptualized identity as a starting
point and as the source of action, we should not underestimate the role of action and practice in creating and transforming (group) identity.

**Intergroup Emotions**

The fact that group identity flows from the sensuous experience of being in the group or crowd points to another potential weakness of the traditional view of identity as primarily a cognitive representation, part of the self-concept. Group identity also involves emotional significance (as signaled in Tajfel’s original definition) as well as behavioral implications. Both of these elements are addressed in a further extension of the social identity approach in which the emotional basis of identity is given a firm grounding in emotion theory: intergroup emotion theory (IET: Smith, 1993). IET draws explicitly on social identity and self-categorization theories and grew, much like social identity theory itself, out of an attempt to understand the social nature of prejudice and discrimination between groups, and to provide a group-level and relational understanding of the diverse forms that these social processes can take.

Perhaps one of the less well-developed aspects of social identity theory concerns the affective meaning given to social identities and to reactions toward out-groups. Intergroup emotion theory helps to furnish some of this meaning and passion by showing how these reactions depend on appraisals of the in-group’s relation with the out-group. Classic social identity analyses of the relation between groups based on status and power, for example, provide appraisals that will color group-based emotional responses, along with associated action tendencies. Thus, groups with low power may fear powerful out-groups (and avoid them), whereas groups with high power will have the strength to feel anger if they feel thwarted by out-groups (and to confront these out-groups); groups with legitimate high status may feel contempt, disdain or even disgust toward low-status groups, and, under less threatening conditions, perhaps more benevolent paternalistic emotions (see also Brewer & Alexander, 2002; Leach, Snider, & Iyer, 2002). The precise emotional reaction is likely to inform and encourage the forms of action tendency (e.g., discrimination, approach, avoidance, etc.) directed toward the out-group.

This analysis helps to explain why the diverse forms of prejudice and discrimination such as racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia have different “signatures” or profiles (i.e., they do not always occur on the same dimensions, nor always even reflect negative evaluations of the out-group). This diversity is not well-captured by a single simple unidimensional form of ingroup bias. Intergroup emotion theory also helps us to understand better why people may be motivated to derogate the out-group as well as simply to enhance the in-group (Brewer, 1999), and to explain more apparently “positive” evaluations of out-groups that nevertheless form a pattern of prejudice (e.g., benevolent sexism, envious prejudices, etc.).

An emotion-based approach to intergroup relations also has much broader application than just understanding the diversity of prejudice and discrimination. It can help to explain more prosocial orientations to out-groups such as collective guilt motivating reparations for past wrongs (e.g., Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998) and anger on behalf of others categorized as similar to self (Yzerbyt, Dumont, Wigboldus, & Gordijn, 2003). Returning to our theme of collective behavior, it can also be applied to predicting willingness to engage in collective action on behalf of the group (Van Zomeren, Spears, Fischer, & Leach, 2004).

Like self-categorization theory, IET helps to inject our understanding of intergroup relations with content and (multidimensional) character, while providing the emotional color that gives group identity more meaning and a behavioral impetus. Although these seeds were arguably already present in the social identity approach, clearly these new developments enrich the theory and help to specify what kind of intergroup behavior will result. Nevertheless, important strengths of the social identity approach remain in its simplicity (in terms of a limited number of key constructs and principles) and
in its generality (in terms of applications and explanatory power). In this respect, it is useful to remind ourselves that social identities and intergroup relations are always open to change, and that flexibility in what is meant by the importance of social context can sometimes be a strength as well as a weakness.

**Summary and Conclusions**

This chapter has considered group identity from a social psychological perspective, through the prism of the social identity approach. This approach is accessible to, or already in use by, sister disciplines (e.g., political science, communication studies, etc.). A major legacy of the social identity approach is to distinguish group-level identities as distinct aspects of self-concept in their own right, and as distinct from personal identity (or identities). Defining self at the social or group level helps to explain the distinctively group nature of much intergroup behavior, and also provides a framework for analyzing intragroup dynamics. Group identity is not just a form of self-definition (the cognitive level of analysis), but also a source of emotional attachment, meaning, and motivation that helps to explain group behavior. It is also the product of group behavior.

Two key themes that together help to explain the dynamics of intergroup conflict, and that clearly motivated social identity theory from its inception, are (a) processes of discrimination and differentiation between groups, and (b) attempts by disadvantaged groups to bring about social change. From this viewpoint, social identity theory in particular represents a normative theory insofar as it identifies with disadvantaged or low-status groups, and with their quest for equality—but it can also inform us about the behavior of high-status groups who seek to maintain their position. Status hierarchies and intergroup power relations form the social structure in which individuals are located, but group identity forms the agency (collective efficacy) that brings the structure alive, and enables individuals to mobilize this structure. Group identity is thus not just a cognitive representation or a way of identifying with a social reality, but also a means to challenge and change that social reality.

Self-categorization theory extended this research agenda by elaborating a theory of self-definition, and by further developing the realm of research in intragroup processes, albeit framed by the intergroup context. This led to an analysis of processes, some of which seem to be more associated with the intergroup context (e.g., salience, social comparison, stereotyping), some more with the intragroup context (e.g., social influence, leadership), and even some of which seem clearly individual (e.g., personality), but all arguably depending to varying degrees on the interplay between intergroup and intragroup processes.

As well as providing a broad overview of social identity theory and self-categorization theory, I have also considered developments and refinements that have attempted to extend the social identity approach in addressing a range of theoretical and practical issues. The social identity model of deindividuation effects specifies effects of situational and contextual factors that can influence the salience of identities, and also strategic concerns about how identity is expressed and mobilized, depending on the power relations between groups. The elaborated social identity model also extends the social identity approach by showing how group struggles can transform and empower identity. Intergroup emotion theory also further specifies the social identity approach by elaborating on its emotional character—explaining the specific forms that prejudice and discrimination can take, and helping to specify and explain a variety of intergroup behaviors not accounted for within the original version of social identity theory. The broad repertoire of appraisal dimensions, emotions, and associated action tendencies specified within intergroup emotion theory further increase the scope and explanatory power of the social identity approach.

The focus of the chapter has been mainly theoretical, with less emphasis on empirical
applications. This is mindful of Lewin’s dictum that “there is nothing as practical as a good theory;” the value of the social identity approach is precisely in its broad applicability to a range of topics and domains that can benefit from the theoretical analysis it provides. And although the concept of group identity and the social identity approach more generally have been fruitfully applied already in a range of different areas, and used in disciplines outside psychology as well as within, clearly the power and utility of this approach is far from exhausted.

In the applications I have considered, I have necessarily focused on group phenomena, and notably collective behavior, as this has also been an especially rich site for further theoretical development. However, in connecting to broader issues of identity addressed in this volume, it is important to note that group identity occupies more than just a small corner of the self-concept. Self-categorization theory has been especially important in showing that not only are group identities multiple, varied, and contingent on social comparison, but that this may be true of our personal self, or rather selves, as well. Moreover, many of the implications of group identity may fold back into our more personal everyday lives, when group concerns might seem to be outside, and far from our door. One particularly interesting development, addressing issues of health, is the idea that group identity can be an important source of strength, support, and coping, that protects us against psychological stress and physical illness, and promotes our well-being (e.g., Haslam, Jetten, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009). Although the group is too often unfairly portrayed as a source of bias and ills in society, we should remember that it can also be a force for good. At the very least, the power of group identity should not be ignored.

Acknowledgments Thanks are due to Rupert Brown for his helpful feedback on an earlier version of this chapter.

References


